

**FIRMILIAN: A
"SPASMODIC"
TRAGEDY**

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Firmilian: A "Spasmodic" Tragedy by T. Percy Jones

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T. PERCY JONES

**FIRMILIAN: A
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FIRMILIAN.

THIS "Tragedy," pronounced to be one of the cleverest satires of the age, ranking with CANNING'S ANTI-JACOBIN papers, and the amusing reproductions of different authors in the REJECTED ADDRESSES, is from the pen of W. E. ATTOUN, the son-in-law of Christopher North, (the late poet Wilson,) the present editor of *Blackwood's Magazine*, and one of the joint writers of the "Bon Gaultier" Ballads, and author, himself, of the *Lays of the Scottish Cavaliers*, acknowledged to be the best poems of the kind since SIR WALTER SCOTT'S "Lay" and "Marmion." FIRMILIAN is a hit at many vulnerable authors of the day, as CARLYLE, GILFILLAN, TENNYSON, and particularly ALEXANDER SMITH, whose "Life Tragedy" probably suggested the work. The various extravagances of these authors are hit off in the poem of FIRMILIAN. As a key to the personages, T. Percy Jones is doubtless Smith; Apollodorus is Gilfillan, as a representative of the poetical puffing school; Mariana is in compliment to Tennyson; the Uncle Tom School is in for a pretty hard hit; while much of the machinery is a travesty of Festus and Faust. The versification is as good as the wit, and both are exquisite. The work originated in a quizzing article by its author, which attracted great attention, a few months since, in *Blackwood*.

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Handwritten notes and signatures, including "H. G. G." and "N. C. H."

Hytou, William Richmond

FIRMILIAN

A

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"SPASMODIC" TRAGEDY.

BY

T. PERCY JONES.



REDFIELD,

110 AND 112 NASSAU-STREET, NEW YORK.

1854.

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ASTOR, LENOX AND
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PREFACE.

As several passages of the following Poem have appeared in the pages of periodicals, I consider it an act of justice to myself to lay the whole before the public. I am not at all deterred by the fear of hostile criticism—I believe that no really good thing was ever injured by criticism; and, so far from entertaining an angry feeling towards the gentlemen who have noticed my work, I thank them for having brought me forward.

It is a common practice, now-a-days, for poets to appeal to the tender mercies of the public, by issuing prefaces in which they acknowledge, in as many words, the weakness and poverty of their verse. If the acknowledgment is sincere, how can they expect the public to show them any favor? If it is a mere hypocritical affectation, it were better omitted. And the practice is unwise as it is absurd. What would we think of the manufacturer who should entreat us to buy his goods, because they were of an inferior kind, or of the tradesman who should deliberately announce that his stock was of a poor quality? For my part, if I conscientiously believed that my poetry was not worthy of admiration, I never would commit the impertinence of asking any one to read it.

There has been, of late, much senseless talk

about "schools of poetry;" and it has been said, on the strength of the internal evidence afforded by some passages in my play, that I have joined the ranks, and uphold the tenets, of those who belong to "the Spasmodic School." I deny the allegation altogether. I belong to no school, except that of nature; and I acknowledge the authority of no living master. But, lest it should be thought that I stand in terror of a nick-name—the general bugbear to young authors—I have deliberately adopted the title of "Spasmodic," and have applied it in the title-page to my tragedy. It is my firm opinion that all high poetry is and must be spasmodic. Remove that element from Lear—from Othello—from Macbeth—from any of the great works which refer to the conflict of the passions—and what would be the residue? A mere *caput mortuum*. I

differ from those who regard verse and poetry as being one and the same thing; or who look upon a collection of glittering conceits, and appropriate similes as the highest proof of poetical accomplishment. The office of poetry is to exhibit the passions in that state of excitement which distinguishes one from the other; and, until a dramatic author has learned this secret, all the fine writing in the world will avail him nothing. *Cato* is perhaps the best-written tragedy in the English language; and yet, what man in his senses would dream of reading *Cato* twice?

I have been accused of extravagance, principally, I presume, on account of the moral obliquity of the character of *Firmilian*. To that I reply, that the moral of a play does not depend upon the morals of any one character depicted